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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000338

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TAGS: PGOV PTER PHUM CE NO

SUBJECT: NORWEGIAN AMBASSADOR HAPPY WITH GENEVA BUT SEES
HARD WORK AHEAD

REF: GENEVA 0395

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead for reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar told Colombo co-chairs reps March 2 that the Geneva talks had exceeded his expectations. An initially tense atmosphere had relaxed over time and made it possible for agreement on a joint statement. Brattskar is fairly confident the next round will take place as scheduled in April but cautioned that both sides, while in his view serious about their Geneva commitments, will have their work cut out for them, especially the government. Colombo co-chair reps agreed that another high-level co-chair meeting is not needed until after the next round but, in the interim, quiet conversations and discreet pressure will be frequent. End Summary

¶2. (C) Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar, just back from the cease-fire implementation talks in Geneva between the government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) briefed co-chair chiefs of mission in Colombo March 2. Japanese Ambassador Suda, Dutch Ambassador van Dyk, EC Ambassador Wilson, Ambassador Lunstead and DCM (notetaker) attended.

"Successful Outcome . . . More Than Expected"

¶3. (C) Brattskar opened by characterizing the results in Geneva as a "successful outcome" and "more than expected." He said his government, however, was being very careful not to "overplay" the success in the media in order not to give ammunition to any party. Brattskar said preparation had been the key. The GSL clearly had put much effort into getting ready for Geneva and it showed. Moreover, he and former Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen had arrived in Geneva early, before Erik Solheim, and held joint and separate preliminary meetings with both sides. This had led to quick agreement on media guidelines which had largely worked in keeping the media away from the venue until the press conference at the end of the meeting (although the Tigers had disregarded the guidelines in

releasing their opening statement to the press, leading the GSL to do the same). In the preliminary meetings, Brattskar had told both sides that agreement had been reached for Sweden to take over the leadership of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). The GSL had suggested it be announced as an "outcome" of the Geneva talks but had not insisted when the Norwegians made clear that they wanted to quietly get the issue out of the way beforehand.

¶14. (C) Brattskar commented that the large size of the GSL delegation had been an issue and drawn complaints from LTTE delegation chief Balasingham (especially when the GSL changed its "front line" at the table at the last minute to include lawyer H.L. de Silva). Both delegations were clearly nervous at the outset and the atmosphere was tense during the opening statements. Day one, Brattskar observed, had included "very direct and open exchanges" and "some drama and theater." But, Brattskar stressed, the atmosphere relaxed over time, with numerous "informal coffee break chats." Moreover, there had been quite a few "smaller meetings" in which a few from each delegation got together on specific issues with a Norwegian facilitator sitting in. Brattskar commented that GSL delegation member Nivard Cabraal, while silent in the main meeting, had played a very productive role in the breakout sessions.

Cease-fire Agreement Brass Tacks

¶15. (C) Brattskar said that, despite numerous press stories to the contrary, the GSL delegation had never, in his view, made a serious effort to amend the cease-fire agreement

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(CFA) during the talks. That said, the two most difficult issues clearly had been paramilitaries (aka "armed groups") and political violence/killings. The fact that the parties had been able to reach a point that they could agree on language on both of these issues in the joint statement had been a significant accomplishment and the basis for Norwegian lead facilitator Erik Solheim's public statement that the talks had "exceeded" his expectations. The most serious stumbling block had arisen during the joint statement negotiations with the Tigers insisting on "cease-fire agreement" and the GSL wanting "cease-fire." In the end, the GSL had back down after talking to President Rajapaksa.

Now To Make It Work

¶16. (C) Brattskar said the key to getting to the next round, agreed for April 19-21 in Geneva (with preliminary meetings on April 18), will be whether the "relative quiet" that has prevailed since late January can continue. He said both sides in Geneva had clearly recognized the "challenge" of implementation and had struck him as serious about their obligations: the Tigers to stop political killings and attacks on the military, the GSL to not allow "armed groups" in government-controlled territory. Brattskar opined that it will be more difficult for the GSL to fulfill its Geneva undertakings than for the LTTE and that it will be revelatory to see how the Tigers react when, inevitably, "somebody gets shot in Batticaloa." Brattskar said his Foreign Minister will urge the LTTE to fulfill its commitments when he meets with the Tiger Geneva delegation (minus Balasingham) in Oslo March 3.

¶17. (C) Brattskar said he found the post-Geneva dustup over comments by GSL delegation member H.L. de Silva that the Geneva joint statement constituted an amendment to the CFA "very uninteresting." De Silva has had a contentious relationship with Balasingham since he participated in the 1987 Thimpu talks. That said, Brattskar conceded, the statement had angered the Tigers. Indeed, Balasingham had called earlier in the day from London to complain about the

statement. Brattskar said he had told Balasingham he understood his frustration but urged him to remember that the GSL needs to position itself domestically for March 30 local government elections and to keep in mind the "ideological spread" in the GSL delegation from "moderate to hardcore." Nonetheless, Brattskar said, he had shared Balasingham's comments with GSL delegation leader Nimal Sirimal de Silva and noted that such statements could only undercut the progress reached in Geneva. Brattskar said the political members of the GSL delegation had been flexible; it was the technical members who caused the most problems.

April in Geneva

¶8. (C) Brattskar said he was confident the next round will take place as scheduled. The Norwegians will work with both sides to try to develop an agenda for discussion beyond CFA implementation. Clearly, he predicted, the LTTE will want to discuss high-security zones (HSZs) in Jaffna and the plight of fishermen who are impeded by GSL coastal security restrictions in the North and East. For its part, the GSL will want to introduce human rights, democracy and economic growth issues.

Time for Quiet Co-Chair Work

¶9. (C) As the discussion turned to when the co-chairs should next meet at the capital level, Japanese Ambassador Suda noted that there had been discussion of Solheim visiting Tokyo around the end of March, leading the Japanese to wonder if a co-chairs meeting should be part of

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his Japan agenda. But, the visit had fallen through and thus a co-chairs meeting in Japan in that time frame was no longer in play. General agreement developed that there was no need for a high-level co-chairs meeting until after the next round of GSL/LTTE talks in April. In the meantime, the co-chairs should, as appropriate, lobby both sides to fulfill their Geneva commitments (as stated in the post-Geneva co-chairs statement) and have "quiet discussions" and "apply pressure" as needed between now and round two in Geneva.

Comment

¶10. (C) This round did go well. President Rajapaksa's tactic of including hardliners in his team to force them to grudgingly go along with his strategy has worked well so far, but it means he is always walking on a thin edge. His greatest challenge now, however, will be to get the military to really enforce the ban on armed elements. We will seek opportunities to reinforce with the President and other GSL officials the need for the Government to live up to its commitments to keep the process going.

LUNSTEAD